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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 003236

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY BEGINS BROADCASTS IN KURDISH, OTHER ANATOLIAN LANGUAGES

REF: A. 03 ANKARA 3974

[B. 03 ANKARA 728](#)

[C. 02 ANKARA 6116](#)

(U) Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4 b and d.

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary: June 7 state-owned TRT broadcasting company began airing news and cultural programs on radio and TV in Kurdish and three other languages traditionally spoken in Anatolia, in a long-delayed GOT effort to comply with EU free speech requirements. Contacts say PM Erdogan and FM Gul ordered that the broadcasts be made after nearly two years of bureaucratic delays. Local media outlets are currently banned from making minority-language broadcasts, and regulations place time limits and other tight restrictions on programming. Still, most observers praise the landmark broadcasts as a good beginning. End Summary.

Historic Broadcasts Begin

[¶](#)2. (U) TRT June 7 began a series of TV and radio programs featuring Kurdish and three other non-Turkish languages traditionally spoken in Anatolia. The broadcasts will be done in one language or dialect per weekday, as follows: Monday - Bosnian; Tuesday Arabic; Wednesday - Kurmandji (the predominant variety of Kurdish in Anatolia); Thursday - Circassian; Friday - Zaza (related to Kurdish).

[¶](#)3. (U) These broadcasts, which include news and cultural programming, are the first of their kind for Turkey. Broadcasts in Kurdish and other languages have generally been restricted to music approved by the Culture Ministry. The use of languages other than Turkish is perceived by some Turks as a threat to national unity; members of the Nationalist Movement Party have staged small protests against the broadcasts. Kurdish is particularly sensitive, given the history of Kurdish separatist movements and the long, bloody conflict with the PKK. Kurdish is also the language most in demand. Latif Okul, head of the TRT Broadcast Supervisory Department, acknowledged some apprehension in a June 4 meeting with us. "This is what we've been directed to do. I hope it is for the good of the country," he said. TRT General Manager Senol Demiroz went on live TV June 4 to announce the language programming, which TRT has titled, "Our Cultural Richness." Demiroz sought to reassure viewers the broadcasts would be non-threatening, concluding his remarks by saying, "the fact that we have a nation-state is not an obstacle to pluralist democracy."

EU-Related Measure Long Overdue

[¶](#)4. (C) The new programs represent a long-delayed GOT effort to meet an EU demand that Turkey lift restrictions against broadcasting in Kurdish. In August 2002 (reftel C) Parliament adopted a reform measure allowing broadcasts in languages other than Turkish "used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives." Previously, broadcasts were permitted only in Turkish and languages relating to the "formation of universal culture and scientific works," which was interpreted as excluding Kurdish and other languages found in Anatolia while allowing many world languages. Nationalist elements of the bureaucracy threw up obstacles to the reform. The High Board of Radio and Television (RTUK) issued a highly restrictive regulation limiting broadcasts in other languages to TRT. After much delay, TRT filed a successful legal challenge to the regulation on the grounds that RTUK lacked the authority to direct TRT programming.

15. (U) To break the logjam, Parliament in July 2003 (reftel A) adopted legislation explicitly allowing private media outlets to broadcast in languages other than Turkish. The subsequent RTUK regulation allows private stations to broadcast in these languages, but limits such broadcasts to national (vice local) stations until RTUK completes a viewer-listener profile determining local demand. However, no private national stations applied for the broadcasts; a number of contacts told us demand for Kurdish and other languages is regional, making it cost-prohibitive for private stations at the national level to develop such programming.

Broadcasts Tightly Restricted

16. (U) In addition to the ban on local stations, the current RTUK regulation places other tight restrictions on the non-Turkish broadcasts. For example:

-- TV broadcasts are limited to 45 minutes per day, 4 hours per week;

-- Radio broadcasts are limited to 60 minutes per day, 5 hours per week;

-- TV broadcasts must include Turkish subtitles; radio broadcasts must be immediately followed by the same program in Turkish;

-- Programming must be directed at adults, and may include news, music, and culture; children's programming is prohibited;

-- Programming aimed at teaching other Anatolian languages and dialects is prohibited.

Human Rights Advocate: Broadcasts Flawed, But Positive

17. (C) Husnu Ondul, president of the Human Rights Association, told us he is critical of the restrictions and other shortcomings, but is nonetheless encouraged by the landmark broadcasts. Though TRT is diluting the Kurdish broadcasts with programs in other languages for which demand is much more limited, he sees value in having State radio and TV promote Turkey's cultural diversity. The biggest problem is the prohibition against local broadcasters. Ondul scoffed at the idea that RTUK needs to conduct a viewer-listener profile. "The State keeps files on everyone -- they already know who speaks what languages," he said. Still, he believes pressure will eventually build to the point where the State will have to make this opportunity available to local stations, at which point Kurds and other groups would be able to develop their own programming.

Broadcasts Prepared Under EU Pressure

18. (C) A number of our contacts told us TRT was required to begin the broadcasts quickly under instructions from PM Erdogan and FM Gul, after EU leaders pointed out that the GOT had not implemented the broadcasting reforms. TRT's Okul denied this to us, but the broadcasts appear to have been hastily assembled. The programming lasts for 35 minutes on radio and 30 minutes on TV. It includes news, culture/music, sports, and a nature documentary. Except for the culture/music section, TRT has repeated the same material with different languages dubbed in each day. The news portion comprises outdated stories, which have already been broadcast in Turkish at least several days before. Turkish Arabs reportedly said the Arabic programs were recorded in an unfamiliar dialect that they could not understand. However, comments from members of minority groups have been overwhelming positive, with the exception of the Chairman of the Bosnia Herzegovina Friends Foundation, who told reporters Turkish Bosnians do not want broadcasts in their native language.

Comment

19. (C) TRT and the Turkish State bureaucracy were dragged into making these broadcasts, and it shows. Every effort has been made to limit the scope of the highly sensitive Kurdish broadcasts. Still, as with many GOT reforms, this has to be viewed as a beginning. For this to lead to true free expression for ethnic groups other than Turks, the State will have to allow local broadcasters to participate, and authorities will have to refrain from opening frivolous criminal cases against them when they do.

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